

Lord of the Files But not the

In this age of mechanization, it is perhaps unremarkable that a machine should be made the ultimate arbiter of human veracity. Everything about you today is put on punch cards, sorted by a computer and, ultimately, tested for truth by that absolute lord of the files, the lie detector.

Last spring, however, Rep. John Moss of California, an incorrigible skeptic, came forward and actually questioned the divinity of this reigning deity. He declared that, although his congressional subcommittee had disclosed "that there is no such thing as a valid lie detector," Government agencies are spending nearly \$5 million a year "to operate the electronic gadgets." As a result of his skepticism, President Johnson has now appointed an interagency committee to determine whether lie detectors are lying.

How the committee will function and what standards it will employ are matters beyond our present ken. It may subject the lie detectors to some test by divination, tea leaves or oracles. But their reliability, it seems to us, is of less significance than the Government's reliance on them. What the committee really needs to discover, if it can, is why, in a free and self-governing society, resort to these 20th century soothsayers has become such a commonplace—and why so many human beings have been willing to submit to the indignity of being tested by them. Will patriotism be tested next?

We cannot help thinking that a little more mutual confidence, a little more trust in one another's devotion to our common values and institutions, will serve the country's safety better than any amount of mechanical or chemical testing.